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Abortion healing ministry marks 25th anniversary

Rachel's Vineyard, RVA, offers retreatants God's mercy, love, grace

KRISTEN L. BYRD

Special to The Catholic Virginian

Richmond's chapter of Rachel's Vineyard, the world's largest post-abortion healing ministry, has helped hundreds of women and men find peace after the trauma of abortion and pregnancy loss. Maggie Colson, Matt Freeman and Marty Montgomery-Jennings – who refer to themselves as “M3” – serve as the chapter's co-facilitators, each feeling spiritually called to its unique mission.

“I have a front-row seat of witnessing the miracle of God's mercy and love and grace,” said Colson, who has been with Rachel's Vineyard for 17 years. “I am also humbled and honored to journey with each participant as their chains are broken and their hearts and souls restored.”

Along with other team members and volunteers, they dedicate themselves to helping people re-

pair what they thought was irreparably severed: their connection to God.

Freeman, who is also a licensed therapist, explained that many

ing makes the effects of abortion – guilt, shame, anger, despair – grow more and more intense, because they have no way to come to terms with these feelings,” he said.

alcohol abuse, and suicidal impulses.

Support for all

Theresa Burke, who has a doctorate in counseling psychology, first introduced the idea of post-abortion healing in the 1980s.

“She realized there was such a need for it, yet no one was talking about it,” Colson said, noting that post-abortion healing was revolutionary for the time. “It was taboo, the pain didn't exist, it was too controversial. Healing for post-abortive men and women wasn't readily available because it wasn't recognized. This caused many to suffer in silence.”

Burke started a support group for women struggling after abortion and later created the Rachel's Vineyard retreat curriculum in the 1990s. Started in Philadelphia, Rachel's Vineyard chapters exist in more than 70 countries.

The Richmond chapter was

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“Healing is possible. God loves all his children, and he doesn't want them to live in the darkness, secrets, unworthiness and shame. Find the courage to make the first call or send the first email... You will not regret it.”

– MAGGIE COLSON

who have had an abortion believe they have committed an “unforgivable sin.”

“The shame and guilt are too great for them to share their stories with anyone else; this silent suffer-

“They become trapped in a loop of self-condemnation from which there seems to be no escape.”

He added that this can result in depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, eating disorders, drug or

US bishops reorient RCIA into Order of Initiation of Adults

New structure invites continuous spiritual formation

DANIEL MELOY
Catholic News Service

IRA TOWNSHIP, Mich. – For anyone interested in becoming Catholic, wishing to complete the sacraments or wanting to learn more about what the Church teaches, the answer for decades was “join RCIA.”

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, the process by which the Church brings in new converts and educates catechumens and candidates, has been a staple in Catholic life and lingo for years.

But in November 2021, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops changed the name of one of the best-known acronyms in the Church, reorienting the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) into the new Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA).

So, is the new answer simply, “join OCIA”?

Yes, but there's more to it than that.

The change from “rite” to “order” is in part because of a retranslation of the Latin name into English, said Mercy Sister Esther Mary Nickel,



(Photo/Michael Mickle)

director of sacred worship in the Archdiocese of Detroit's Department of Evangelization and Missionary Discipleship.

“(The bishops) retranslated the Order of Initiation of Adult Catechumens (Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum) from Latin,” Sister Nickel told Detroit Catholic, the archdiocese's news outlet.

It might seem like semantics, but changing

the process of entering the Church from a “rite” to an “order” has practical implications, Sister Nickel said.

For one thing, rites are still part of the order, but the new structure is meant to invite candidates and catechumens into a continuous process of spiritual formation as opposed to fixed checkpoints on the path to baptism, first Communion and confirmation.

Ideally, those interested in joining OCIA would not have to wait until the fall to do so, Sister Nickel said.

“We want to propose and help people institute in Families of Parishes (parish clusters) an ongoing catechesis and formation so people can come into the Church more frequently and not necessarily wait to begin the process of faith formation as disciples. That will be the big difference of a yearlong catechesis and accompaniment,” she explained.

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Richmond, VA 23294
7800 Carousell Lane

The Catholic Virginian

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*The One
lying in the
manger feeds us,
sustains us*

iStock

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For many, the Christmas dinner with loved ones is a highlight of this season. This is understandable because it is an occasion to be fed physically and emotionally. Besides enjoying the great food, we recall what has happened since the last time we were together, retell memories of Christmases past that often evoke laughter and tears, and take and send multiple pictures of the celebration.

People, especially as they get older, will often remark after these gatherings, “That was the best gift I could have received, to spend time with family during Christmas!”

The most prominent image we have of the Nativity of Our Lord is one in which Jesus is lying in a manger. Among the thousands of artistic interpretations of that event, the ones that focus upon the Christ Child in that bed of straw are the ones that draw our attention when we celebrate his birth.

Years ago, after grace at the beginning of family holiday meals, my Italian grandfather would invite everyone to begin eating by saying, “Mangi, mangi!” The manger, whose Italian word derivative is “mangi” meaning “eat,” was the feeding place for animals.

The description of Our Lord being placed in a manger at his birth is a symbol

and reminder of the truth that the one who was lying in that manger is the one who feeds us, sustains our souls. It is through the Incarnation — God coming to us in the form of man — that we are brought back into his saving grace. The birth, life, death and resurrection of his Son are God’s everlasting gift to us.



Just as we are in communion with family and friends at the Christmas dinner table, Christ’s birth is very much a eucharistic feast in which we are in Communion with him by sharing in his body and blood. If not for the Incarnation and Nativity of Our Lord, this spiritual feast would not be possible!

As we prepare for a year in which we will highlight the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, this Christmas season provides us with an opportunity to meditate more on how it is that we are sharing in that Communion. It is a time when we can reflect upon how — being spiritually fed by him — we are continuing to be the Body of Christ for others.

We are, as was our Blessed Mother, “Theotokos” (Christ bearers). We are called, by our words and actions, to share in this Communion ourselves, and to proclaim his message to all, to invite them to share in his Communion as well.

May you and all whom you hold dear be blessed this Christmas season, and may you grow closer to Christ in the Eucharist throughout 2023.

Mangi, Mangi!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond

Parish community helped silver jubilarian's ministry grow

Deacon David Nemetz has served St. Michael, Glen Allen, for 25 years

JANNA REYNOLDS
The Catholic Virginian

As he approached his silver jubilee on Tuesday, Dec. 6, Deacon David Nemetz said he still has a hard time believing that it was all "God's plan."

"I never dreamed that I would be in a position where I can help people become what they're supposed to become," he said. "So that's very humbling from a faith standpoint. The fact that you have this tremendous opportunity and responsibility to try to maximize the amount of gifts that are in front of you."

Deacon Nemetz said empowering people is a huge part of what he has learned to do over 25 years.

"It's about giving them the confidence to be out of their comfort zone. It's about trying to do the collective good for the community and for the Church, and if you do that well, then you're really not needed," he said. "So you started it, you managed it, you maintained it, and then you were able to get out of the way and let God take over."

Ministry 'rooted in marriage'

Deacon Nemetz was ordained to the permanent diaconate on Dec. 6, 1997, by Bishop Walter F. Sullivan. His entire diaconal ministry has been at St. Michael the Archangel, Glen Allen.

He said that his ministry "really is rooted in (his) marriage" to his wife of 43 years, Karen. If it had not been for her "generosity" and "willingness to share her husband with the Church," he said he would not have been formed at all.

He and Karen met in 1977 when he was a student at St. John Vianney Minor Seminary in Richmond. They were married at Our Lady of Lourdes, Richmond, in 1979, and they share three children and eight grandchildren.

Deacon Nemetz said St. John Vianney was "a great escape" from his home life, where he was growing up in a rough neighborhood. He said that the nine months of the year that he lived at the seminary provided a "transformation" and a window into "a whole world that you would have never been exposed to."

He graduated in 1978 when the seminary was closed. He became a carpenter and had his own business.

Deacon Nemetz worked in carpentry until 15 years ago, when Father Dan Brady, pastor of St. Michael, asked him to consider working for the parish full time.

After some hesitancy and a discussion with Karen, he accepted the position.

As pastoral associate at St. Michael, the deacon is responsible for the pastoral care of over 30 ministries, parish life and human concerns.

Deacon Nemetz said that he

helps coordinate twinning ministries with other parishes, funeral ministries and other parish activities, which involves organizing, providing resources, creating a budget, placing items on the calendar and ensuring accountability.

"I would say the biggest joy of that is watching the gifts of the people, given the opportunity and an environment that's healthy, and watching them grow. That's what I get to do more than anything else," he said.

He also does pastoral counseling, which he said is "described as a firehouse mentality."

"When something is on fire, you sit with a person for an hour to an hour and a half. You're not the end result; you're just supposed to be there, so they know somebody at the church cares and loves them," he said.

In addition to preaching at Mass occasionally, he also helps meet the sacramental needs of parishioners by performing baptisms, witnessing marriages and conducting memorial services.

Growing with the parish

As St. Michael was being formed in 1992, parishioners used to gather at Short Pump Middle School and a Methodist church for Mass.

From the first weekend, Deacon Nemetz helped set up the worship space before Mass and break it down afterward. At the request of the founding pastor, his participation with the parish increased.

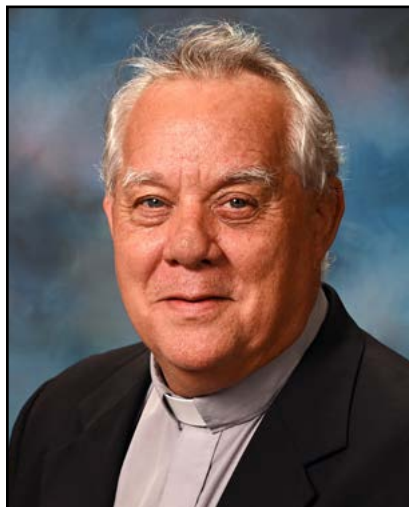
"Even though I hadn't been overly involved in other churches, this was a new beginning of a church, and it was really exciting to get involved early on," said Deacon Nemetz.

As the parish grew and the need for sacramental help became apparent, Deacon Nemetz was asked by the pastor to consider becoming a deacon.

He received formation through a variety of institutions. His main formation was earning a certificate from the three-year LIMEX (Loyola Institute for Ministry Extension) Program from Loyola University in New Orleans.

"I was required by the Diocese of Richmond to do everything that the master's people were doing. I had to write all the papers, even though I wasn't required (to do it) for the certificate program," he said, noting that he did not participate in the master's program because he had not done any undergraduate studies. "So by the end of the program, I did everything that they did, except for the last one because I was already ordained and working at that point."

He also went to Cincinnati for a week each year for five years for homiletics work, studied Scripture at Notre Dame during the summers,



Deacon David Nemetz

and was involved in a youth ministry program in New Jersey.

"It was a challenge initially, but it was definitely worth it because for the first time in a long time, I was challenged in a lot of different ways," he said.

Leading by example

Deacon Nemetz was part of the formation team for the class of permanent deacons that followed him.

"It was a lot of fun for me because I got to technically go through their formation," he said, noting that he heard the speakers who flew in from St. Meinrad Seminary in Indiana or other places. "It wasn't like a whole other formation, but I certainly gained a lot of insight with them from those classes."

He led the candidates in morning prayer, and also set up chairs, took out the trash and served lunch to help them "understand that that's the role of the deacon."

"I intentionally, purposely, tried to lead by example by saying no one is more important than the next task and there's no job we shouldn't do, no matter what it was," he said.

Although he has not mentored any permanent deacons who were ordained after him, Deacon Nemetz said he feels he has been able to model "being present" for those who have considered the ministry.

"I just think having somebody

to go forward so that all of a sudden (being a deacon) becomes an option for other people. I think that was more of it," he said. "Now they had seen a deacon, (and said) 'I wonder what he's about. I wonder what he does. Gosh, I might be interested in doing that.'"

Connection with parishioners

The parish community at St. Michael has been an important part of Deacon Nemetz's service because they allowed him to grow into himself as a deacon.

He said for the first 10 years, he "was able to hide away from the church and still work," just coming to the parish when the pastor needed him.

"When I first started, I didn't feel worthy to do this. I couldn't keep my head raised up and look at people because I had never been in public, I had never spoken in public, I had never read in public," he said. "And our community was so gracious in the sense of how they treated me because they knew that it was extremely difficult for me to do those things publicly."

When he accepted the full-time pastoral associate position, things began to change because he was called to serve more often.

After 25 years, Deacon Nemetz has experienced "a nice, slow, steady growth" of becoming comfortable with the parishioners because they know each other's stories.

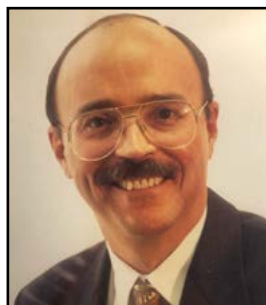
"Everybody knows who we're dealing with, and we're still called to live out the Gospel. They've allowed me to challenge them to do that," he said. "And once you get away from the 'This is about me challenging you' to 'This is the Gospel challenging us,' it all made sense."

To mark his silver jubilee, Deacon Nemetz preached at all five Masses during the weekend of Dec. 4 – something he said he never requests to do – to "take time to reflect on the 25 years with the congregation."

"I want to thank them for the 25 years, for what they've meant to me and my family," he said.

IN MEMORIAM

Deacon Patrick O'Donnell



A funeral Mass was celebrated for Deacon Patrick O'Donnell at St. John Neumann Catholic Church, Powhatan, on Friday, Sept. 23, 2022. Deacon O'Donnell, 69, died on Tuesday, Sept. 13.

In June 2000, Deacon O'Donnell was ordained to the permanent diaconate in the Diocese of Portsmouth, United Kingdom. He had served at St. John Neumann, Powhatan, since 2008.

He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Martha; children, Kate, Kelley and James; granddaughter, Selene; and four siblings.

Christmas Eve confessions to be heard at RVA 'inn'

FATHER ANTHONY MARQUES
Special to The Catholic Virginian

“She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7).

Christmas is the celebration of the Incarnation — the Son of God became completely human while remaining fully divine.

When Christ “made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14), there was no proper dwelling for him. Sometimes, there is no “dwelling” for him in our lives, as sin, busyness and other preoccupations — especially around the holidays — occupy the “inn” of our hearts. The sacrament of penance removes these obstacles so that Christ finds a welcome home.

Confession is an excellent way to prepare for Christmas. Parishes provide extra opportunities to receive the sacrament of reconciliation during Advent by having penance services with multiple priests. In addition to those opportunities, several parishes in Richmond (RVA) will have confessions at 10 a.m. on Christmas Eve.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, quoting the Council of Trent (1545–1563), explains that, “For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation ‘is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation’” (1468).

This teaching is an encouragement to discover, or rediscover, the value of reconciliation at Christmastime, when the Church celebrates the consolation of Christ’s saving presence on Earth.

The Gospel of Luke reports that when the shepherds heard the angel’s proclamation of the Savior’s birth, they dropped everything to go to Bethlehem: “They went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger” (2:16). Receiving the sacrament of penance before Christmas is a way to emulate the shepherds’ gusto — to place God at the center of our lives and encounter Christ among us.



A gift for you

Priests will be available to hear confessions on Christmas Eve, beginning at 10 a.m., at the following parishes in Richmond:

Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, 823 Cathedral Place
Pro-Cathedral of St. Peter, 800 E. Grace St.
St. Benedict, 300 N. Sheppard St.
St. Bridget, 6006 Three Chopt Road
St. Elizabeth, 2712 2nd Ave.
St. Paul, 909 Rennie Ave.
Our Lady of Lourdes, 8200 Woodman Road

Editor’s note: If you do not reside in Richmond, please contact your local parish for confession times during Advent.

Pope: Meet Jesus in the manger

CINDY WOODEN
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY – Stopping to gaze at and perhaps pray before a Nativity scene is one of the best ways to remember the real meaning of Christmas, Pope Francis said.

“In its genuine poverty,” the pope said, “the creche helps us to rediscover the true richness of Christmas and to purify ourselves of so many aspects that pollute the Christmas landscape.”

Pope Francis met Dec. 3 with the artisans who carved the 18-piece Nativity scene in St. Peter’s Square; the donors of the white pine Christmas tree; the residents of a psychiatric rehabilitation center who, along with a group of students and grandparents, created the ornaments; and with representatives of the government of Guatemala, which set up another Nativity scene in the Vatican audience hall.

“Simple and familiar, the Nativity scene recalls a Christmas that is different from the consumerist and commercial Christmas. It is something else. It reminds us how good it is for us to cherish moments of silence and prayer in our days, often overwhelmed by frenzy,” Pope Francis told them during a midday gathering.

The group was scheduled to



The Nativity scene is pictured in St. Peter’s Square after a lighting ceremony at the Vatican Dec. 3, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

gather in St. Peter’s Square in the evening for the official unveiling of the Nativity scene and the lighting of the Christmas tree. But a major rainstorm with a forecast for more caused the Vatican to move the evening festivities indoors, although hundreds of people still were in the square for the lighting.

Meeting with the donors, Pope Francis encouraged everyone to find some quiet time to spend before a creche at Christmas.

“Silence encourages contem-

plation of the child Jesus,” the pope said, and “helps us to become intimate with God, with the fragile simplicity of a tiny newborn baby, with the meekness of his being laid down, with the tender affection of the swaddling clothes that envelop him.”

“If we really want to celebrate Christmas,” he said, “let us rediscover through the crib the surprise and amazement of littleness, the littleness of God, who makes himself small, who is not born in the

splendor of appearances, but in the poverty of a stable.”

To truly encounter Jesus, the pope said, people must meet him in the manger, leaving their own vanity and pretense behind.

“Prayer is the best way to say thank you before this gift of free love, to say thank you to Jesus who desires to enter our homes and our hearts,” he said. “Yes, God loves us so much that he shares our humanity and our lives.”

“Even in the worst moments,” the pope said, “he is there, because he is the Emmanuel, the God with us, the light that illuminates the darkness and the tender presence that accompanies us on our journey.”

The lights on the Christmas tree, he said, are a reminder that Jesus came “to lighten our darkness, our existence often enclosed in the shadow of sin, fear, pain.”

But, the pope said, the tree also should make people think about the importance of roots.

Like a tree, he said, only a person who is “rooted in good soil remains firm, grows, matures, resists the winds that shake him and becomes a point of reference for those who look upon him.”

The Christmas tree, Pope Francis said, is a reminder of the need to remain rooted in Christ.

Eucharist calls Catholics to share spiritual nourishment

EMILY JANSEN
The Catholic Virginian

“The spiritual journey is one of acknowledging our weaknesses,” said Sister Kateri Mitchell, a Sister of St. Anne, “and journeying towards our strength, which is God, in communion with others.”

On Wednesday, Nov. 9, 2022, Diocese of Richmond employees at the Pastoral Center in Richmond packed into an overflowing conference room to hear a presentation sponsored by the Office of Native American Ministry in celebration of Native American Heritage Month.

Sister Mitchell spoke about the relationship between Native American culture and the Catholic faith, specifically regarding devotion to the Eucharist. She is a member of the Turtle Clan of the Mohawk Nation, a matriarchal and matrilineal society of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Sister Mitchell began the presentation by recognizing the indigenous communities that exist within Virginia's borders. Of the seven tribes that are federally recognized in Virginia, only two have designated reservations. One tribe was recognized by a 2015 decision of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs; the six others received federal status under the Thomasina E. Jordan Indian Tribes of Virginia Federal Recognition Act of 2017.

After setting the tone of the presentation with this information, Sister Mitchell led the recitation of the Iroquois Thanksgiving Address to show the interconnectedness of relationships within indigenous cultures.

The life of each individual is a series of cycles and relationships, Sister Mitchell explained, with the central relationship being between oneself and God. This interconnectedness of

life is expanded further: with the Earth, water, plants, animals, medicine and weather. For the Indigenous Catholic, she said, these other forces are not merely in co-existence with humanity; they are companions on the sacred journey to which each of us are called.

Remarking on the lunch provided for participants, Sister Mitchell highlighted the connection between the physical nourishment of the meal with the spiritual nourishment of the ministerial discussion, as both are essential for undertaking the sacred journey. Deeper nourishment is provided in the reception of the Eucharist, she explained, and the Christian call is to bring this nourishment received in the sacrament to others.

“The presence of Jesus in our lives needs to reflect and radiate to others,” said Sister Mitchell, noting that being present with one another is a form of evangelization that follows the example given by Christ himself.

Something that non-Indigenous people may find surprising, explained Sister Mitchell, is that Indigenous cultural gatherings are often very silent. The emphasis is that “your bodily presence is more important than what you say,” she said.

Throughout the presentation, Sister Mitchell emphasized how these practices and beliefs are universal, just as, “Catholic means universal.”

Among the commonalities between indigenous culture and the Catholic faith discussed by Sister Mitchell, she said that each person is called to their own sacred journey and needs spiritual and physical nourishment to fulfill one's vocation, regardless of individual culture. She also emphasized sharing meals, the interconnectedness of the human family and the importance of belonging to one another.



Prior to her talk at the Pastoral Center on Wednesday, Nov. 9, 2022, Sister Kateri Mitchell shows Msgr. Walter Barrett Jr., director of the Office for Black Catholics, a first-class relic of St. Kateri Tekakwitha. (Photo/Daniel Villar)

In reflecting upon her experience as an Indigenous religious, Sister Mitchell said, “The two spiritualities together are so rich, and it is up to us as Indigenous Catholics to embrace both cultures to make us stronger and more able to follow God's call for our lives.”

Prior to her talk, Sister Mitchell honored those gathered with the presentation of a first-class relic of St. Kateri Tekakwitha.

The relic was part of a miracle in 2006, when Sister Mitchell placed it on 6-year-old Jacob Finkbonner while he laid in his hospital bed suffering from an infection of flesh-eating bacteria. It was this miracle of healing that led to Pope Benedict XVI proclaiming Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha a saint in 2011, making her the first Catholic Native American saint.

Film focuses on caring for creation, interconnectivity of life

MARK PATTISON
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – Pope Francis is getting more non-Catholics to do his work.

The latest is Nicolas Brown, who directed “The Letter: A Message for Our Earth,” a documentary on the pope's 2015 encyclical “Laudato Si’ on Care for Our Common Home.”

The 90-minute film will air Wednesday, Dec. 21, 8 p.m.-9:30 p.m. EST on PBS (check local listings). But for those who can't wait that long, the documentary is already on YouTube, which helped produce it.

“We decided to make this film and not put it behind a paywall. We purposely did not go to Netflix and put it behind the reach of anybody,” Brown told Catholic News Service during a Dec. 7 video interview. Brown was speaking from Oxford, England, where he is at work on other environment-related projects.

“YouTube is a sort of spiritual place. PBS took on that spirit as well. They don't feel that they (the two services) overlap. They both feel they want to hear this message, which speaks to very different demographics inside society, which I think is very good sign for the environment.”

Brown said he was skeptical when approached about making



a film about the pope's encyclical, which addresses caring for creation and the interconnectivity of all life on the planet.

“I'm not Catholic, I'm not religious. I'm agnostic, let's say,” Brown said. But when he read “Laudato Si’” in Rome, he admitted, “I was blown away. The proverbial plank was lifted from my eyes. I think I was quite prejudiced against people of faith, thinking that because they had their belief and faith, they wouldn't support my personal truth and belief.”

Brown said, “As I spent more time with the cardinals and the

brothers and the monks and nuns in Rome, I saw this incredible symbiotic relationship between science, faith and religion.” He added, “I understand that there's always points of disagreement, but the points of agreement were so much more than what I anticipated.”

From his making of “The Letter,” “I learned the benefits of moral leadership,” he said. “Let's face it. Scientists do not have much to say about the morality of why we should care about our planet.”

Brown explained that he wants “to bring ‘Laudato Si’ to life not only

for my people, the sort of technocrats and privileged people of the world ... but also to understand this road that the pope took and many religious people took.”

“The Letter” chronicles some of the threats to the environment worldwide, including the devastating Australian fires of 2020 and the shrinking of the coral reefs in the Pacific Ocean. The show's title refers not only to Pope Francis' encyclical, but to an invitation sent by the pope to five people – whom Brown described as “the voices of the voiceless” in their advocacy for protecting the planet – to meet with the pontiff at the Vatican.

If you think obtaining footage of Amazon rainforest clear-cutting is tough, it's simple compared to what Brown said was the hardest sequence to film: “Clearly, getting the interview with the pope was the most difficult. Even if you have the Vatican Dicastery for Human Development and the Dicastery for Communication on your side, he's notoriously said, ‘I don't do interviews.’”

Brown settled for a consolation prize: “What we got was not an interview, it was a conversation (with the five climate activists). He arrived 20 minutes early and left 20 minutes late. So we had 80 minutes with the pope, which I am told is a lot,” he told CNS.

Remember those whose hearts are aching

GUEST COMMENTARY

LUCIA A. SILECCHIA

Several years ago, I was standing in a checkout line behind two women who were deep in conversation. I couldn't help overhearing that one was recently widowed and struggling to adjust to this new season of life. Most of their conversation, however, was drowned out by the lilting strains of "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" playing over the loudspeakers.

That moment of odd juxtaposition reminded me that, for many, the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas holds a measure of sorrow.

Like the stranger shopping with me, many dread their first Christmas without a loved one. Others are facing their second, or ninth, or 27th Christmas without a loved one when the blessed numbness of the first year has passed and the reality of loss has taken hold.

There are some who expect with dread that this may be the last Christmas they will share with a suffering family member or friend. There are some passing the first season when an adult child will not be able to come home. This may be the first Christmas away from the family home because downsizing or simple economics mean the home was sold and the large table that had long been the setting for family feasts is no more.

It may be the season when a military deployment keeps a member away from home – knowing he or she will miss a child's first Christmas or a grandparent's last.

Others have no time or energy to celebrate because they silently work multiple jobs or scramble to care for those unable to care for themselves. Still others know they will not celebrate Christmas in their own homes because they will be keeping vigil with loved ones in hospitals, hospices or nursing homes.

For some, the cares of life may

have robbed them of a bit of their own faith in a season when it is yearned for the most.

Advent seems particularly meant for those who carry great burdens. It comes in the darkest days of the year when the nights are the longest and light most scarce. It is a season that recalls the ancient world's aching wait for Christ, yearning for the tidings of great joy that had not yet come.

It is not a season of red and green and gold and silver, but of purple – because the joy promised is hoped for, but not yet here.

If you are facing Christmas with sorrow in your heart, I hope that you will find comfort in believing that, truly, Advent is the season for you. It is the season for all those who hope for what they do not have, and who yearn to see light after a season of darkness.

All appearances to the contrary, Advent is not the season of the jolly songs and frantic festivities of Christmas. It is the season for hearts

that hope and souls that seek.

If this year has treated you well, I have a gentle suggestion. During the remainder of Advent, remember all those you know whose hearts might be aching. Devote some time to them during this season of yearning, waiting and hoping in the darkness. A visit, an email, a text, a letter, a phone call or the promise of prayer might be what they need to know — to know that they do not wait alone for the light to dawn.

Advent seems the perfect time to assure those who suffer that Advent is, in the words of ancient carols, a time to "rest beside the weary road" until, once again, "a weary world rejoices." It is a season to help each other move toward Christmas peace by sharing the burdens of ordinary times.

Lucia A. Silecchia is a professor of law and associate dean for faculty research at the Catholic University of America. Email her at silecchia@cua.edu.

Sacred art could encourage vocations

I appreciate Bishop's Knestout's commentary on sacred art (Catholic Virginian, Nov. 14). If we were to expand our concept of "vocations" to include iconographers (among other professions whose purpose is to portray the beatific vision), it seems to me our Catholic communities would benefit in several ways.

The power of truth, goodness and beauty, portraying Catholic belief and practice, would draw in the unbaptized and strengthen the faith, hope and charity of Catholics. The numerous parishes would be a step closer to being the special communities which people usually travel long distances to see at monasteries

or basilicas – little islands of heaven on Earth.

Some of the viewers, and the iconographers, composers, builders, etc., encouraged at the parish level by the Church to employ their talents in the service of God and neighbor, might fall so much in love with the beatific vision that they are drawn to the formal sense of "vocations" – holy orders and consecrated life.

– Anthony Rago Jr.
Newport News

Church should evolve view of same-sex marriage

Re: "Amended marriage bill still threatens religious liberty"

(Catholic Virginian, Nov. 28)

It's been over seven years since the Obergefell Supreme Court ruling in 2015 found a constitutional right to same-sex civil marriages. Since that time, my traditional marriage has not faltered, and I have seen no evidence that the Supreme Court ruling has impacted other traditional marriages. In fact, the only change I have seen in our society is a rise in violent crime against the gay, lesbian and transsexual community.

Cardinal Dolan and the other leaders of the Catholic Church need to understand that marriage is good for society. They need to meet, talk to and befriend members of the LGBTQ community because they will see that the love they share is no dif-

ferent than the love my wife and I share for each other. And they will find that same-sex love does not hurt anyone. They also need to understand that their bigotry toward the LGBTQ community is only impacting Christ's desire that we love one another.

Young people are leaving the Church in droves, and it is exactly Cardinal Dolan's position that is a leading cause. The Catholic Church will survive, but only because it will eventually evolve and understand that, like its condemnation of Galileo, its current position of same-sex marriage is way off base.

– Philip L. Russo Jr.
Virginia Beach



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Interim Assistant Editor: Janna Reynolds (804) 622-5168 jreynolds@catholicvirginian.org

Creative Director: Stephen Previtera (804) 622-5229 sprevitera@catholicvirginian.org

Circulation: Ashly Krebs (804) 622-5226 akrebs@catholicvirginian.org

Eastern Correspondents: Wendy Klesch and Jennifer Neville

Western Correspondents: Karen Adams and Joseph Staniunas

Central Correspondents: Kristen L. Byrd and Rose Morrisette

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Healing

Continued from Page 1

founded by Kay Marie and Joe Geiger in 1995, who trained directly under Burke. Weekend retreats have been offered since 1997.

Originally sponsored by Church of the Epiphany, the local Rachel's Vineyard is now sponsored by Our Lady of Lourdes, Richmond. OLL pastor Father Jonathan Goertz, who has been a strong supporter of the ministry since he was a seminarian, serves as its sponsor priest.

Rachel's Vineyard relies heavily on a Respect Life grant from the Diocese of Richmond as well as donations collected throughout the year. A total of \$21,972.87 of Respect Life funds was awarded to Rachel's Vineyard in 2022. The ministry asks all parishes in the diocese to publish information about the program four times a year in their bulletins.

Though Burke is Catholic and the program is rooted in Christian teachings, Rachel's Vineyard is open to people of all faiths or of no faith at all. Though a fee is usually charged to attend a retreat, Rachel's Vineyard also offers financial assistance depending on the individual situation. No one who needs help is turned away.

"The entire program is designed to build trust and connection with God, themselves, their children, each other and the team, noted Montgomery-Jennings, who has a Master of Social Work. "The team is a group of trained and dedicated people who truly have servants' hearts and compassion for those who are suffering."

Team members complete a two-year formation training program that includes a dozen meetings, extensive reading and several group activities. Richmond's team members have helped establish other chapters across

the country, and recently helped translate materials for a new chapter in Romania.

"The healing starts with the individual making the first phone call or sending the first email," said Colson. "This takes a tremendous amount of courage on their part. We recognize this as a huge step because it is often the first time they are surrendering to the belief that healing just might be possible. The mustard seed of hope."

Each retreat is facilitated by multiple trained team members, a licensed professional counselor and a priest. Participants are invited but not required to pray, receive the Eucharist if they are Catholic, and attend a memorial service at the conclusion of the retreat.

"As the weekend progresses, they come to understand the truth of God's love for them, the nature of the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit to give them the strength to face the truth of their pasts, and the hope to embrace the truth of God's love," said Freeman.

Continued healing

Retreats are conducted twice a year at an undisclosed location to protect attendees' privacy. Rachel's Vineyard takes the trust retreatants have placed in them seriously and does all they can to ensure everyone feels respected and welcomed. All attendees must adhere to a strict pledge of confidentiality, and the use of social media is not permitted.

"Once they arrive, they are surrounded with others who understand how they feel, have empathy, and with whom they are able to feel safe," said Montgomery-Jennings.

The retreats include Living Scripture exercises that utilize guided meditation, Scripture readings and Scripture re-enactments.

One Scripture passage that is examined is the story of the woman charged with adultery and her impending punishment of being stoned to death. When Jesus challenges anyone who is free from sin to cast the first stone, the woman is not killed.

Freeman explained they begin by having attendees read the story and then meditate, imagining themselves as the condemned woman, before the re-enactment begins.

"We introduce an actual stone, the size and type that would have been used to stone people to death back then. One at a time, each participant or retreat team member holds the rock, and contemplates what it's like to feel condemned, by themselves or by society at large," he said. "Then, each has a chance to re-enact the exchange between Jesus and the woman. The exercise ends when all retreatants have been told they are not condemned, and to say that they condemn no one."

The retreatants' journeys do not end when the retreat does.

About a month later, there is a reunion with a potluck lunch and several hours of group work, followed by a free 14-week virtual online course. Retreatants are also invited to reach out anytime they need support.

Twenty-five years after Richmond's first retreat, M3 looks to the future with hope.

"Healing is possible," said Colson. "God loves all his children, and he doesn't want them to live in the darkness, secrets, unworthiness and shame. Find the courage to make the first call or send the first email... You will not regret it."

Editor's note: To learn more about Rachel's Vineyard or to donate to the ministry, please visit RV4Hope.org or email RV4Hope@gmail.com.

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settles a refugee family,
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Merry Christmas!

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Diocese of Richmond

Office of the Bishop

Christmas 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the spirit of thanksgiving for God's most wonderful gift of Jesus Christ born to us, I ask God's abundant blessings upon you and all those you love.

During the season of Christmas, we can easily be consumed with gifts and material cares. In the busyness that surrounds us we can become distracted from the true gifts, those that really matter, and what truly defines this holy season—the gifts of peace, joy, unity, and most importantly, the gift of Jesus Christ. When we embrace these precious gifts, we truly embrace this holy season.

On Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, parishes throughout the Diocese will take up a special second collection to support the life changing work of Catholic Charities. Commonwealth Catholic Charities and Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia impact many lives & communities throughout the Diocese every day. Their mission expresses this love and joyful hope through volunteers, staff, and board members who steadfastly provide food, clothing, shelter, guidance, and support for individuals and families who are on their way to a brighter future.

As you gather to worship on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, I encourage you to consider a generous gift to our Catholic Charities through the second collection. Through your generosity you are making the work of these incredible organizations possible. I am sincerely grateful for your past support for the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors across our Diocese and the world. I ask you to continue that generosity this Christmas by giving to Catholic Charities.

Throughout this holy season of Christmas and in the new year, may God grant to you and your family and friends, every grace and blessing as I remain,

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond

Pastoral Center • 7800 Carousel Lane, Richmond, Virginia 23294-4201 • Phone: (804) 359-5661 • Fax: (804) 358-9159



Diocese of Richmond

Office of the Bishop

Navidad 2022

Queridos hermanos y hermanas,

En el espíritu de acción de gracias, con el don más maravilloso de Jesucristo que nos ha nacido, pido abundantes bendiciones de Dios sobre ustedes y todos aquellos a quienes amas.

Durante la temporada de Navidad, podemos vernos atraídos fácilmente por regalos y cosas materiales. En el ajetreo que nos rodea, podemos distraernos del verdadero significado, lo que realmente importa y lo que realmente define la temporada santa: los dones de paz, alegría, unidad y, lo más importante, el regalo de Jesucristo. Cuando aceptamos estos preciosos dones, realmente acogemos esta temporada sagrada.

En la víspera y el día de Navidad, las parroquias de todas la Diócesis realizarán una colecta especial para apoyar el trabajo de cambio de vida de Caridades Católicas. Commonwealth Catholic Charities y Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia, impactan muchas vidas y comunidades en todas las Diócesis día a día. La misión expresa el amor y la esperanza gozosa a través de los voluntarios, personal y miembros de las juntas que constantemente brindan alimentos, ropa, refugio, orientación y apoyo a las personas y familias que están en camino hacia un futuro mejor.

Cuando te reúnas para adorar en Nochebuena o en el día de Navidad, los animo a que consideren hacer una generosa donación a Caridades Católicas a través de la segunda colecta. A través de esta generosidad, estarás haciendo posible el trabajo de estas increíbles organizaciones. Estoy sinceramente agradecido por tu apoyo en el pasado, a las necesidades de nuestros vecinos más vulnerables en nuestra Diócesis y en el mundo. Les pido que continúen con esa generosidad esta Navidad, donando a Caridades Católicas.

A lo largo de esta santa temporada de Navidad y en el año nuevo, espero que Dios les conceda a usted, su familia y amigos, la gracia de Dios y muchas bendición siempre.

Sinceramente en Cristo,

Reverendísimo Barry C. Knestout
Obispo de Richmond

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New Christmas stamp features cherished image

BOSTON (CNS) – Every two years, the U.S. Postal Service issues a traditional first-class Christmas stamp showing Mary and Jesus, and this year's stamp features an oil-on-panel painting from the first half of the 16th century titled "Virgin and Child."



(CNS photo/courtesy U.S. Postal Service)

waist and the other tenderly touching his arm, while the Christ child turns his head to look out of the frame to the left.

"I am honored to represent the Postal Service as we dedicate a Christmas stamp that features one of the most

Attributed to a Florentine artist known since the late 1960s as the Master of the Scandicci Lamentation, the painting is in the Robert Dawson Evans Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

The stamp was designed by Greg Breeding, co-founder and creative director of the Journey Group design firm in Charlottesville, Virginia. He is one of four art directors who regularly work with the USPS.

The painting depicts Mary gazing downward at the Christ Child, with one of her arms holding him protectively at his

revered images in the world – the Virgin Mary holding her infant child, Jesus," Jenny Utterback, USPS organization development vice president, said when the stamp was unveiled Sept. 22.

The 2022 religious Christmas stamp is "a beautiful piece of art, with particular meaning this time of year," Utterback said.

"I choose my holiday cards with care, sign them with love or best wishes, and may write a personal note inside," she added. "Holiday cards are a special way to connect with family and friends. The stamp on the envelope holds significance as well."

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HAPPEN TOGETHER



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Office of Safe Environment
DIOCESE OF RICHMOND

Jesus' story is one of mystery and grace



IN LIGHT OF FAITH
BARBARA HUGHES

Advent is bathed in mystery. There is, of course, the Mystery of the Incarnation, but there's also the mystery of time. Advent is rooted in the longing of the Israelites, a longing that resonates with the deepest longing in the heart of every person. Like the Old Testament prophets who looked for the coming of the Messiah, we await the day when the veil of time will be pierced.

Liturgical readings alternate between the past and future because Advent is not about living in the past; it's about celebrating Christ's presence here and now in the Eucharist and in one another, even as we are reminded that Christ will come at the end of time.

The juxtaposition of time often reminds me of "A Christmas Carol" when old Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by the spirits of Christmas past, Christmas present and Christmas future. These nighttime visitations result in his turning his life around, causing him to cast the old self aside.

So it happens that in the final scenes, we see Scrooge dancing down the street, shouting "Merry Christmas" to everyone he meets,

whereas in the past all he could say was "Humbug." The story ends just as we hoped and leaves us feeling that all is right with the world.

It seems that when the mysteries of God become more than we can fathom, we naturally turn to story. We create a narrative that has a beginning, a climax and an end. But God is beyond the constraints of time, and so when God broke into human history, a new narrative was born, though certainly not the one that was expected.

The Jews were expecting a glorious king who would restore Israel to its former glory once and for all. But the reality could not have been more different. The Son of God came into the world, born from the stump of Jesse, but there were no royal trappings surrounding his birth. He came into the world largely unnoticed, in a borrowed cave that was used to shelter animals.

As the evangelist John wrote: "He came to his own, but his own did not accept Him" (John 1:11). His rejection was but a foretaste of the destiny that would be his as Savior of the World.

Some people find it curious that Matthew begins the story of Jesus' birth by recounting the genealogy of Jesus. He introduces the Son of God providing a record of the family of Jesus Christ,

beginning with the son of Abraham. As we know, Jesus' family tree contains murderers, adulterers, thieves and liars, but rather than hide the skeletons in Jesus' closet as we are prone to do, the evangelist puts them front and center.

Matthew also includes five women in his genealogy, an unexpected turn according to Jewish tradition. That fifth woman is Mary, whose fiat set forth the dawning of a new day and whose body became the Ark of the New Covenant.

Knowing that God's human history contains a pretty shady lineage is reassuring. The same God who chose to write the beginnings with crooked lines writes the sequence with crooked lines. And so, we, those crooked lines, gather, confident that God uses sinners to build his kingdom on Earth.

This is the reason Advent is filled with hope. It reminds us that God has a penchant for using the least and most unlikely to accomplish great things, not because of who we are but because of who God is — a God who writes straight with crooked lines.

As Christians, we know how Jesus' life ends, so it is with this understanding that the Church arranges and interprets Scripture, paring the Hebrew Scriptures with the Gospels and the letters of the

apostolic Church.

Only in claiming both are we able to see within the New Testament the fulfillment of the old. Taken together as our history, they shed light on what was because the past is always best understood in retrospect.

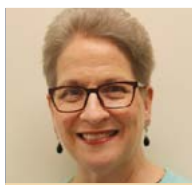
In Kairos, (Christ's time), the cyclical nature of time is more than an anomaly. It's a sublime dance, a momentum that is purposefully designed to draw us into a story that is mystery and grace.

This liturgy of Jesus' life began with the call of Abraham and is ongoing. It invites us to dance down the street like old Ebenezer Scrooge, or better yet, to fall on our knees like the shepherds, who despite their lowly status — or perhaps because of it — fell on their knees before God.

What happened in Bethlehem was never meant to stay in Bethlehem, and so we join the unlikely choir of angels and shepherds who sang "Glory to God" while we sing "Come Maranatha"!

Barbara Hughes is an author, retreat facilitator and spiritual guide. She lives in Virginia Beach and can be reached at brhughes16@gmail.com.

Angelic visits to Joseph make Advent possible



BELIEVE AS
YOU PRAY
MELANIE CODDINGTON

In today's first reading, we meet Ahaz, king of Judah. Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the south), once united under David and Solomon, have long since separated into rival kingdoms. Some 200 years down the Davidic line, Ahaz takes the throne and disgraces the dynasty with infidelity to the Lord. As his enemies — including Israel — join forces against him, he panics and seeks aid from a formidable Assyrian king.

Despite Ahaz's offenses, the Lord God continues to honor his covenant promise to David's house. At God's prompting, Isaiah reassures Ahaz that God has not abandoned him and that he need not resort to a perilous alliance to escape danger.

As proof of his firm support and protection, the Lord even offers to do something extraordinary. Reluctant to offend his Assyrian ally, Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, hiding behind the excuse, "I will not tempt the Lord!" Isaiah announces the sign anyway: "...the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel."

Psalm 24 extols the Lord's kingship over "the earth and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it." This One's reign knows no bounds; it attracts all persons to seek God's face with clean hearts and hands. In Romans 1, St. Paul manifests this universal vision as he explains his call as apostle to the Gentiles.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the Gospel of Matthew comprise what scholars call his "infancy narrative." The evangelist uses dreams as the principal means of divine communication, especially when characters require course correction to fulfill the will of God.

Chapter 1 begins with a genealogy that traces the ancestral line, from Abraham to David, from David to the time of the Babylonian exile, and from the exile to Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus.

The parade of male names stops four times for the mention of women, all Gentiles (with scandalous stories attached). This list with a twist functions as a dramatic set-up for this Sunday's Gospel. It places Jesus in the honorable family of Abraham and David, even as it highlights the agency of women in irregular circumstances in the unfolding plan of the God of Israel.

After the genealogy, we come to today's passage about the birth of Jesus. The evangelist first speaks of Mary, a Jewish woman, in circumstances irregular and scandalous. Betrothed to Joseph, Mary has become pregnant before

living with her husband. Matthew's account does not dwell on Mary's dilemma but quickly shifts its focus to Joseph's response.

Considering Mary's situation and his own, Joseph makes the righteous and compassionate choice "to divorce her quietly." He then finds himself the recipient of an angelic visitation that changes his course of action. His dream reveals that Mary's child, conceived through the Holy Spirit, has a great destiny to fulfill as savior and presence of God among the people.

Joseph wakes and takes Mary under his protection. He then names and claims her son as his own, in accordance with the angel's instruction. Joseph's "yes" to God gives Jesus a firm place among his people and sets the stage for his unfolding destiny. (The name "Joseph" recalls the story of another ancient dreamer and interpreter of dreams.)

In the rest of chapter 2, we find Joseph once again living up to his name. An angel of the Lord appears in a dream, telling him to gather up the family and flee the wrath of Herod. So, the Holy Family takes up residence in Egypt (following the path of the ancestors) while Herod systematically eliminates the threat to his throne by killing off Jewish boys two and under.

Only after Herod dies does Joseph the dreamer get the word, first to return to Israel, then to settle a good distance away from Herod's successor — in Nazareth.

Melanie holds a master's in pastoral studies from Loyola University, New Orleans.

Fourth Sunday of Advent, cycle A

Is 7:10-14; Ps 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6;

Rom 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24

OPPORTUNITIES

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond Office of Finance is seeking a full-time finance project manager & auditor. This position is anticipated to last 18 months to support special projects. This position supports the Finance Office by providing monthly analysis of diocesan Catholic school financial statements, serving as financial analyst on parish and school specific projects and by performing parish and school internal audits on a cyclical basis as needed. This position will be an accounting resource and will serve as ParishSoft subject matter expert. The finance project manager & auditor is a full-time position (35 hours per week) scheduled for 8:30 am – 4:30 pm Monday – Friday. Occasionally, extra hours may be required. In state travel is required. Must maintain a good driving record. Hybrid remote telework is available after orientation period. Interested candidates should provide a cover letter, resume and completed application (bit.ly/3GQsokh). For additional questions, please contact Kelly Shumate, HR generalist/recruiter at jobs@richmonddiocese.org.

Holy Spirit, Virginia Beach, is seeking a full-time facilities maintenance coordinator, responsible for ensuring all areas of the parish campus are in good repair to help provide a safe and hospitable environment. Qualifications include high school diploma or equivalent with previous maintenance and supervisory experience. Knowledge and understanding of technical subjects (including carpentry, electrical, plumbing, sanitation, mechanics, HVAC and grounds maintenance) is highly desirable. Successful candidates must have a valid driver's license and a clean driving record and must be able to lift/move objects of 75 pounds consistently, with heavier weight necessary at times. The position is 40 hours per week and is non-exempt from the requirements of the FLSA. Interested candidates should apply and include a cover letter and resume to Father Matt Kiehl at fathermatt@holyspiritvb.org.

St. Joan of Arc, Yorktown, is seeking a courageous and well-formed Catholic to be our youth and young adult minister to plan and lead a comprehensive catechetical youth ministry program with various components. The youth minister will organize events, including service opportunities and social activities within the parish. This individual recruits and engages adult volunteers to participate in events, and will be responsible for supervising volunteers including program leaders and support staff. This person will lead the parish confirmation program. Must be a practicing Catholic in good standing. A bachelor's degree in theology or religious studies is required; master's degree preferred. Experience in establishing and maintaining balanced budgets.

The candidate must be a team player with excellent interpersonal and communication skills. Please send cover letter, diocesan application (<https://bit.ly/36ndEsX>), and resume to JoeG@stjoanofarcva.org.

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, West Point, is seeking applicants for the position of director of music. The successful applicant should have a bachelor's degree in music or equivalent professional experience. They should have a working knowledge of MS Office products and preferred to have bilingual English/Spanish skills. This position is responsible for overseeing the music arrangements for all parish liturgies. This is an 8-12 hour per week part-time position with flexible hours to include nights and weekends, available Dec. 1, 2022. Salary is negotiable based upon qualifications and experience. If interested, please submit a completed Diocese of Richmond employment application with a cover letter to Robert S. Ryalls, business manager, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, 207 W. Euclid Blvd., West Point, Virginia 23181 or submit via email to: businessmgr@olbs-catholic.org

SHORTTAKES

St. Elizabeth, located at 2712 2nd Ave., Richmond, will celebrate the World Day of Peace Mass on Sunday, Jan. 1, 2023, 10 a.m. This Mass is dedicated to praying for universal peace, the care of one another and forming a community that prays for peace with action. Contact Cathy Woodson at 804-683-1227 or Cwood329@gmail.com with any questions.

All are welcome to join Father John Kazibwe from the Church of the Epiphany on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Jordan April 19-29, 2023. This 11-day tour to two countries for \$4,399 includes round-trip airfare, 4-star hotels, daily Mass, breakfast and dinner, and much more! A few places on the itinerary include the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Garden of Gethsemane and the Basilica of Agony, the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu. In Tiberias, we will sail through the Sea of Galilee, tour Nazareth, and witness the site of the Transfiguration. Pilgrims can also go to the Dead Sea. We will spend two nights in Amman and visit Petra. For further information, please contact Alba Kim at 804-298-4035 or tours@albastours.com. You can also visit <https://www.albastours.com>. Reservations are available now. Spaces are limited.

Please join us at St. Stephen, Martyr, Chesapeake, for our annual Christmas Cantata presented by the SSM Adult Choir! The concert will be held Wednesday, Dec. 21, 7 p.m., in the church. We will continue the de-

licious tradition of sharing our favorite home-baked Christmas cookies, so please bring a tray to share! We hope to inspire you with our beau-

tiful music just in time for the celebration of Christmas. All are invited and welcome! For more information, please email jessica@ssmrc.org.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD

Good people doing good things: The Society of St. Vincent de Paul conference at Sacred Heart, Richmond, held its 5th annual luminary night following All Souls' Day Mass on Wednesday, Nov. 2. The Mexican holiday Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, was also celebrated that day. The luminary night brought together the parish's cultures as deceased loved ones were honored with decorated bags illuminated with battery candles. The \$870 raised from the sale of the bags will go to those who need help paying rent or utilities.


Embracing diversity: Three Roanoke Catholic School students produced and organized the inaugural Culture Fair held in the school gymnasium on Wednesday, Nov. 9. Amara Ezigbo, Jasmine Louis and Malissa Louis, freshmen at Roanoke Catholic, approached the administration last spring with the idea to highlight the student population's diverse cultural heritages. During the event, 10 interactive tables, each hosted by parents or adults affiliated with RCS, showcased traditional foods and cultural items from different countries with which RCS students have cultural ties.

Congratulations I: Church of the Holy Apostles, Virginia Beach, an ecumenical community of Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, celebrated its 45th anniversary on Sunday, Oct. 30.

Congratulations II: Walsingham Academy's varsity boys' soccer team won its first Virginia Independent Schools Athletic Association (VISAA) Division III state championship on Monday, Nov. 14, with a 3-1 victory over Wakefield. The team advanced to the championship game for the first time in school history when it defeated Vertias on Tuesday, Nov. 8.


What have you heard? The CV would like to know what you've heard — or read — regarding Catholics in your community receiving honors and awards, as well as achievements, accomplishments and other good stuff. We'll try to publish a selection of submissions in each issue of The CV. Put "What we've heard" in the subject line and email your item to akrebs@catholicvirginian.org. Include your name and phone number in case we need to follow up. Information cannot be taken over the phone.

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La dimensión universal del acontecimiento guadalupano

Ante la próxima celebración de la Fiesta de la Virgen de Guadalupe el 12 de diciembre, el padre Miguel Ángel Rodríguez de la Arquidiócesis de Puebla, México, ofreció a Vatican News una reflexión sobre la devoción a nuestra Madre, Emperatriz de América y Patrona de Filipinas

CIUDAD DEL VATICANO

El próximo 12 de diciembre, fiesta de la Santísima Virgen de Guadalupe, el Papa Francisco presidirá a las 18 horas la misa en la Basílica de San Pedro en oración por Latinoamérica y los devotos de la Virgen Guadalupe en todo el mundo. Un evento, organizado tradicionalmente por la Pontificia Comisión para América Latina.

En un artículo del padre Miguel Ángel Rodríguez, de la Arquidiócesis de Puebla, México, el sacerdote recuerda que los cristianos devotos a la Emperatriz de América y Patrona de Filipinas, nos estamos preparando al próximo Jubileo Guadalupano en 2031 y al Jubileo de la Redención en 2033. Al respecto, en su reflexión pide detener nuestra atención en un aspecto esencial del acontecimiento guadalupano: su universalidad.

Extraordinario ejemplo de evangelización inculturada

A nueve años del V centenario del acontecimiento guadalupano, los católicos de todo el continente americano estamos convocados a redescubrir el significado profundo de la presencia de Jesucristo a través de María en nuestras tierras. La Virgen nos ha dejado un extraordinario ejemplo de evangelización inculturada, se lee en la reflexión del sacerdote, que nos llama a valorar las advocaciones marianas que nos interpelan en cada una de nuestras distintas naciones.

La Virgen María en sus apariciones, lo hace con el más humilde, niños o como en este caso, un humilde indio creyente, San Juan Diego. El padre Rodríguez hace un repaso de la historia de las apariciones, su mensaje y propósito: pedir que se le construyera una “casita” en ese lugar, en el cerro del Tepeyac, desde donde pudiera atender las necesidades de sus hijos y consolar sus corazones. Un espacio más amplio en el que Ella deseaba morar, vivir, permanecer, ...y actuar, reflexiona el sacerdote.

Una revelación para el mundo

“La Revelación es absolutamente clara en este sentido: el Apóstol san Pablo, en su primera carta a Timoteo, le dice que Dios quiere que todos los hombres se salven y llenen al conocimiento pleno de la verdad (2,4). Y el Magisterio de la Iglesia lo ha enseñado así desde el principio. El Catecismo de la Iglesia, por ejemplo, afirma en efecto que toda acción divina tiene la finalidad última de que las criaturas entren en la unidad perfecta de la Santísima Trinidad (cf. 260)”.

Al respecto, el padre Rodríguez afirma que “además de la Revelación sobrenatural contenida en la Sagrada Escritura y en la Tradición, y de los sagrados Sacramentos, las auténticas apariciones de la Virgen María y las diversas revelaciones particulares reconocidas por la Iglesia son una expresión genuina y real del deseo de Dios todopoderoso de que todos los hombres experimenten el perdón y la paz, y caminen alegres en una esperanza cierta hacia la vida eterna”.



Regalo Inmenso de Dios

La Virgen de Guadalupe, regalo inmenso de Dios al mundo, a través de un pueblo particular, “al que la presencia viva de María –y en Ella la del Salvador del mundo– lo llena de gratitud y lo llama a una generosa respuesta de fe y de acción”. De forma análoga, señala el religioso, a como el pueblo judío dio al mundo entero al Hijo de Dios, Jesucristo, el pueblo que se ha encontrado con Jesucristo a través de Santa María de Guadalupe siente apremio por participar al orbe entero la inmensa riqueza del acontecimiento guadalupano, que se acerca a su quinto centenario.

El Papa Francisco y la Virgen de Guadalupe

El Papa Francisco, recientemente, en su oración de consagración de Rusia y Ucrania al Inmaculado Corazón de María, el 25 de marzo de 2022, utilizó las palabras que María de Guadalupe dirigió a san Juan Diego, en la cuarta aparición. Las palabras del Papa en esta oración son elocuentes:

En esta hora oscura, ven a socorrernos y consolarnos. Repite a cada uno de nosotros: ‘¿Acaso no estoy yo aquí, que soy tu Madre?’. Tú sabes cómo desatar los enredos de nuestro corazón y los nudos de nuestro tiempo. Ponemos nuestra confianza en ti. Estamos seguros de que tú, sobre todo en estos momentos de prueba, no desprecias nuestras súplicas y acudes en nuestro auxilio.

Así mismo, el 26 de julio, durante la visita que el Santo Padre realizó al Canadá, nos recordó:

Durante el drama de la conquista, fue Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe la que transmitió la recta fe a los indígenas, hablando su lengua y vistiendo sus trajes, sin violencia y sin imposiciones.

Nuestra devoción a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

Por último, el Padre Rodríguez recuerda que la Virgen María, Madre de Dios, aparecida en el Tepeyac a san Juan Diego en 1531, es Madre de todos los hombres y, desde el Templo construido como casa suya al pie del Tepeyac –y en cada corazón–, atiende y sana el alma de sus hijos, a quienes les entrega su mayor tesoro, Jesucristo.

“Su maternidad y su labor no tienen límite, y son alegremente una magnífica noticia para todos nosotros, en todos los aspectos: tanto en los caminos de la vida interior como en el devenir y en los desafíos de la vida humana actual, ya sea en México, en Canadá, en la Patagonia, o en el doloroso escenario de conflicto entre Rusia y Ucrania. Así, pues, nos alegramos al reconocer que la santísima Virgen María, que ha querido llamarse “Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe”, se presenta ante nosotros y llama a sus hijos de todos los continentes y países a recurrir a su intercesión, a ponerse bajo su sombra y resguardo, a encomendarle todas sus preocupaciones y miserias, para recibir de Ella a Su Hijo, Jesucristo, el Salvador, en quien el mundo puede confiadamente poner su esperanza”.



Order

Continued from Page 1

The catechumenate is meant to be an ongoing formation process in which the initiated are invited to become involved in the parish, attend Mass and OCIA classes and work with catechists in delving into topics such as creation, salvation, the sacraments, the Church and the four “last things” (death, judgment, heaven and hell).

Still part of the OCIA process are rites such as the Rite of Entrance to the Catechumenate and the Rite of Sending, which both occur at the parish level, and the Rite of Election, which occurs at the cathedral with the bishop, said Amy Wyss, associate director of sacred worship at the archdiocese.

“Following that is a series of rites called the scrutinies, and after that are the Rites of Initiation,” Wyss explained.

These rites are not new to the Church, but by making the entire process an “order,” the candidate or catechumen understands the rites received in church or at the parish are just one part of the ongoing journey of discipleship that will culminate with baptism and confirmation — usually during the Easter Vigil — but will continue throughout their lives.

Catechumens (those who have yet to be baptized) and candidates (those yet to be confirmed in full communion with the Catholic Church) will not progress to the next rite in the OCIA process until they are ready, Wyss said.

“It’s about a relationship with Jesus Christ. It’s about coming to knowledge of Jesus Christ and then bringing my life into conformity with

his teachings. Yes, we have these beautiful experiences in the liturgy that are integrally part of this. But what is happening is the process of coming into relationship with our Lord,” she said.

A major benefit is that people can enter the OCIA process at any time in the calendar year and can receive the sacraments of initiation at any time, not just during Easter.

“For those coming into the catechumenate, it’s not a straight line where everyone is doing the same thing or on the same path,” said Tina Kovalcik, director of religious education at Immaculate Conception Parish in Ira Township, 40 miles northeast of Detroit. “If they are not ready to go through to the next step, we don’t push them. It is up to the catechumens and the pastor, and if they are not at the level of faith yet, we don’t go through with the next rite. Likewise, others really catch onto it and are ready almost immediately.”

The OCIA process encourages candidates and catechumens to take charge of their faith education, ask questions of catechists and explore the answers.

Most catechumens and candidates will still be received into the Church during the Easter Vigil, but OCIA encourages them to get involved in the parish community even before they receive the sacraments, sowing seeds of discipleship that will grow well beyond confirmation, said Matthew Hunt, director of religious education at St. Thecla Parish in Clinton Township, near Detroit.

Meloy is a staff writer for Detroit Catholic, the news outlet of the Detroit Archdiocese.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for December 18, 2022

Matthew 1:18-24

Following is a word search based on the Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Cycle A: Joseph and the Angel. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

- | | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| BIRTH | MOTHER | TOGETHER |
| FOUND | CHILD | HOLY SPIRIT |
| HER HUSBAND | SHAME | DIVORCE |
| THE ANGEL | APPEARED | A DREAM |
| SON OF DAVID | BEAR A SON | SAVE |
| PEOPLE | SINS | FULFILL |
| VIRGIN | EMMANUEL | AWOKE |

JOSEPH'S ENTRY

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A D R E A M O T H E R K
P W C E E C R O V I D W
P X O H H A Y L I D L
E D B K I T A N V F N C
A E E G E L E A N B A C
R L A S M M D G J I B F
E P R E A F M B O R S U
D O A H O V S A K T U L
N E S N K N E D N H H F
U P O V I R G I N U R I
O S N S T H E A N G E L
F T I R I P S Y L O H L

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